

Resurrection and Justification

Luther's Use of Romans 4, 25

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I Romans 4, 25 in Luther's biblical Thesaurus

The construction of the Wittenberg theology of reform required the construction of a new thesaurus of frequently-cited and doctrinally-useful Scripture passages. The Wittenberg reformers could not always employ the traditional biblical citations used by medieval theologians to explain some scholastic topics which they retained, and they formulated some topics with their own distinct emphases, creating a new shape to the body of biblical teaching. The doctrine of the justification of the sinner in God's sight serves as one example: Bernhard Lohse commented that Luther treated some aspects of this doctrine in a fresh way and that »the kind of concentration on one particular article of faith, as is the case with Luther [in regard to justification], is without any precedent.«¹ Romans 4, 25, Paul's dictum that Christ »was handed over [into death] for our sins and was raised for our justification,« illustrates Luther's use of a passage to summarize the atoning work of Christ and its application to the justification of sinners.

1 B. LOHSE, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang*, 1995, 275; *IDEM*, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. R. A. HARRISVILLE, 1999, 259. H. OBERMAN, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, ²1967, 160-184, makes it clear that Gabriel Biel spoke of salvation in Scotist terms of »acceptation« more than of justification and that his concept of salvation fundamentally involved the ontological infusion of the habitus of grace rather than the relational reality created by the gospel as re-creative Word of God. On the broader influence of Scotus' view of acceptation, his functional equivalent of justification, in the late middle ages, see W. DETTLOFF, *Die Entwicklung der Akzeptations- und Verdienstlehre von Duns Scotus bis Luther, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Franziskanertheologen* (BGPhMA 40.2), 1963.

Lohse does not treat the connection between justification and the resurrection of Christ in his own treatment of Luther's understanding of justification in his *Luthers Theologie*, nor does he mention Luther's use of Romans 4,25 regarding God's justifying action in Christ when treating that topic.² Neither does Paul Althaus in his comparable work as he examines Luther's understanding of the work of Christ and the righteousness bestowed upon sinners through it.³ Oswald Bayer emphasizes the connection between God's creating and his justifying as »categorical gifts,« but does not discuss justification in the context of Luther's proclamation of the resurrection.⁴ Marc Lienhard describes »the victory of Christ and justification by faith« as themes highlighted in Luther's great Galatians commentary, but he does not examine the ways in which Luther traces Christ's justifying action to his resurrection.⁵ Hans-Martin Barth connects Christ's return to life with the renewal and transformation of believers but not specifically with their justification.⁶ Exceptions to the scholarly silence regarding the association in Luther's thought of resurrection and justification include Ulrich Asendorf and Jens Wolff. Uwe Rieske also recognized the link in Luther's thinking between the justification of the sinner and Christ's resurrection triumph over the sinner's enemies.⁷

2 LOHSE, *Theologie* (s. n. 1). 274-283; IDEM, *Theology*, 258-266.

3 P. ALTHAUS, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 1962, 177-195; IDEM, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. R. C. SCHULTZ, 1966, 201-223.

4 O. BAYER, *Martin Luthers Theologie. Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 2004, 87-92; IDEM, *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Th. H. TRAPP, 2008, 95-101.

5 M. LIENHARD, *Martin Luthers christologisches Zeugnis. Entwicklung und Grundzüge seiner Christologie*, 1980, 210-220, 268-273; IDEM, *Luther. Witness to Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology*, 1982, 269-286, cf. 361-365.

6 H.-M. BARTH, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers. Eine kritische Würdigung*, 2009, 503, cf. 244; his extended discussions of justification speak of the healing of the broken relationship between God and the sinner, but not specifically of justification through Christ's resurrection, 253-257, 264-277, 290-298, 491. Barth also highlights the connection between baptism and justification (331-335), as does J. TRIGG, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (SHCT 56), 1994, 2, but without specifically tying the latter into the resurrection in Christ. Cf. also R. KOLB, *Martin Luther, Confessor of the Faith* (Christian Theology in Context), 2009, 118-129.

7 U. RIESKE-BRAUN, *Duellum mirabile. Studien zum Kampfmotiv in Martin Luthers Theologie* (WFKDG 73), 1999, esp. 247-250.

Asendorf's examination of Luther's theology on the basis of sermons emphasized the connection of the two themes, especially with reference to his preaching on 1 Corinthians 15 but also with a recognition of the importance of Romans 4, 25 for this topic.⁸ Wolff also treats the resurrection of Christ as the source of the life and righteousness of the faithful although he does not extensively develop the tie between Jesus' rising from the dead and the act of justifying the sinner.⁹

Luther's treatment of the resurrection won the attention of twentieth-century scholars, especially in the wake of Gustaf Aulén's argument that Luther had returned to what Aulén labeled the »classic« »Christus Victor« motif to explicate how God had accomplished salvation through Christ.¹⁰ Aulén used Irenaeus as his »type« for this classic view and emphasized that, for all his focus on the Incarnation, Irenaeus also took seriously Christ's death for guilty sinners, along with his resurrection, as necessary elements of Christ's redemption of sinners.¹¹ Althaus aptly criticized the Swedish scholar's one-sided over-emphasis on that aspect of Luther's teaching and preaching, but the Erlangen scholar also failed to make clear that the substitutionary satisfaction of which Luther speaks is Christ's suffering God's wrath as he receives the »wages of sin,« death itself, and not merely so much intense suffering.¹²

Marc Lienhard¹³ and Ian Siggins respond to Aulén by correctly rejecting the idea that Luther formulated a systematic definition of the atonement. Siggins comments that Luther had no »coherent explanatory discourse about how the atonement works,« but instead his sermons »abound in the motifs which figure in the historic atonement theories – patristic, classic, dramatic, or Western, Latin, and penal; objective or subjective.«¹⁴ Because the atonement did not become the subject of difference and dispute in

8 U. ASENDORF, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten*, 1988, 116-128.

9 J. WOLFF, *Metapher und Kreuz. Studien zu Luthers Christusbild* (HUTh 47), 2005, esp. 480-507.

10 G. AULÉN, *Christus Victor. An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. HEBART, 1969, esp. 101-122.

11 *Ibid.*, 22-35.

12 ALTHAUS, *Theology of Luther* (s. n. 3), 218-223.

13 LIENHARD, *Luthers christologisches Zeugnis* (s. n. 5), 136; cf. BARTH, *Theologie* (s. n. 6), 270.

14 I. SIGGINS, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (YPR 14), 1970, 109.

the sixteenth century,¹⁵ no need for more specific definition of how God accomplished salvation arose among the Wittenberg reformers. Had it, Luther might well have explicitly resisted trying to fathom God's thinking on why God chose incarnation, death, and resurrection as the path to rescuing his fallen human creatures from sin and restoring them to righteousness. As it was, Luther simply proclaimed his understanding of the biblical narrative of God's saving action, of Christ's work and the Holy Spirit's delivery of the benefits of Christ to his people.

In his exposition of the work of Christ in Romans, Paul comes to a key transition with the summary statement of 4, 25: »he was handed over for our trespasses, and he was raised for our justification.« The frequency with which the Wittenberg reformer used this passage should not be exaggerated, but at key points in his confession regarding God's salvation of sinners, he used this passage, often as a summary without elaboration. On occasion, especially in some of his sermons for Easter, he expanded on its significance. In so doing he used the resurrection to define what he understood to be the biblical teaching on the justification of sinners, on their restoration to righteousness in God's sight.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the implications of this for Luther's and Melanchthon's students, see R. KOLB, »Not Without the Satisfaction of God's Righteousness,« *The Atonement and the Generation Gap between Luther and His Students* (ARG Sonderband: Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa. Interpretation und Debatten, ed. H. R. GUGGISBERG and G. G. KRODEL, 1993, 136-156).

¹⁶ Current exegetical treatments of Romans 4, 25 do discuss the connection of Christ's resurrection with the justification of the sinner; see, e.g., A. NYGREN, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. C. C. RASMUSSEN, 1949, 183f. N. WRIGHT, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume X, 2002, 504, treats the resurrection as the declaration that Jesus is Messiah, and therefore that »all who belong to Jesus, all those who respond in faith to God's faithfulness revealed in him are themselves part of the true covenant family promised to Abraham. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus can at this level be seen as the declaration of justification.« J. DUNN, *Word Biblical Commentary*. Volume 38. *Romans 1-8*, 1988, 240f., suggests that this verse may have been an early Christian formula of creedal nature, reflecting the fourth Servant song (Isaiah 52-53), and that the resurrection reveals that »the justifying grace of God is all of a piece with his creative, life-giving power,« the resurrection being »proof positive that the same life-giving power which wrought for Abraham and Sarah is still at work in this new stage of God's dealing with humankind and at work in eschatological strength.«

The association of justification with the resurrection was not unheard of in medieval treatments of the concept. As Joseph Fitzmyer has pointed out,¹⁷ Augustine¹⁸ had been an exception among Latin fathers in that he shared the position of Greek fathers, including John Chrysostom¹⁹ and Cyril of Alexandria,²⁰ in associating the restoration of righteousness with Christ's rising from the dead; Peter Lombard²¹ and Thomas Aquinas²² also affirmed this position. The *Glossa ordinaria* commented on Romans 4, 25:

»Who was handed over, etc.: The death of Christ signifies the demise of the old life and in the resurrection a new life which begins from justification and is completed by immortality. The death and resurrection of Christ are the same in terms of what they effect, freeing us from sins and the yoke of the devil, but in terms of what they signify they are different: for death signifies that we die to the old life: the resurrection that we may walk in newness of life and thus finally in newness of immortality, just as Christ already, we may rise again.«²³

How much of the patristic and medieval interpretation of this verse Luther knew remains unclear. In the winter semester 1515–1516 he lectured on Romans 4. He glossed verse 25 by commenting simply on »for our offenses,« »that they might be destroyed and put to death,« and »for our justification,« »that it might be established and brought to completion.«²⁴ His scholion on the text reveals that he was still embedded in the conversation with his scholastic instructors but also that he was moving toward

17 J. FITZMYER, *The Anchor Bible. Romans*, 1993, 389 f.

18 AUGUSTINE, *Sermones* 236,1 (PL 38:1120).

19 JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, In epistolam ad Romanos homilia 9,1 (PG 60:467).

20 CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Ad Reginas De recta fide Oratio altera*, 2,51 (PG 76:1407f.).

21 PETER LOMBARD, In epistolam ad Romanos 4,25 (PL 191:1378).

22 THOMAS AQUINAS, In epistolam ad Romanos 4, 3; *Summa theologiae* 3,56.2 ad 4.

23 *Biblia Latina cum glossa ordinaria*. Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81, ed. K. FROELICH and M. T. GIBSON, Volume 4, 1992, 283: »Qui traditus etc. Mors Christi interitum veteris vitae significat: & in resurrectione nova vita quae a iustificatione incipit & immortalitate perficitur. Mors & resurrectio Christi in nobis efficiendo sunt idem, quia liberavit nos a peccatis & a iugo diaboli, sed significando sunt diuersa: quia mors significat ut moriamur veteri vitae: resurrectio ut in novitate vitae ambulemus & sic tandem in nouitatem immortalitatis, sicut Christus iam: resurgemus.«

24 WA 56; 48,15–17 (= LW 25; 42).

his mature understanding of the nature of God's justifying action in Christ and the faith which grasps it:

»The death of Christ is the death of sin, and his resurrection is the life of righteousness, for through his death he made satisfaction for sin and through his resurrection he delivers righteousness to us. Thus, his death does not merely signify but also accomplishes the remission of sins as an all-sufficient satisfaction. His resurrection is not only the sacrament of our justification, but it effects this righteousness in us, if we believe in it. The resurrection is its cause. More later on this. All the scholastic theologians speak of one change: the expulsion of sin and the infusion of grace.«²⁵

Within the Romans lectures it is not possible to identify a passage in which Luther returned to this connection of resurrection and justification as he here said he would. But his continued use of Romans 4, 25 as a summary of the work of Christ for the salvation of sinners demonstrates that these insights remained with him throughout his career. In a sermon at the end of 1516 he defined »alien righteousness« as that which »is necessary to make people sinners, unrighteous, liars, miserable, foolish, lost;« in other words, it is »the suffering of Christ and sufferings in Christ, the crucifixion of the old man and the mortification of Adam.« He continued, »God's proper work, however, is the resurrection of Christ, justification in the Spirit, and the vivification of the new creature,« the proof: Romans 4, 25.²⁶

He had cited the passage earlier, in his lectures on the Psalms. In speaking of Christ's ascension over sin (on Psalm 68, 10), Luther used the words »he rose for our justification« to affirm what Christ had done for mortals.²⁷ On Psalm 111, 4 the passage supported the reformer's distinction of »merciful« and »gracious« since it speaks of »justifying grace« as distinct from guilt forgiven by grace.²⁸ As he turned to Galatians, following his Romans lectures, he called on Romans 4, 25 twice: once with a more casual reference that focused on putting to death the lusts of the flesh (on G 2, 20),²⁹ once on Galatians 1, 1, Christ's being raised by the Father. There he linked being raised with Christ to faith:

25 WA 56; 296,17-23 (= LW 25; 284).

26 WA 1; 112,24-113,10 (= LW 51; 19).

27 WA 3; 393,2-5 (= LW 10; 327).

28 WA 4; 243,29-35 (= LW 11; 378 f.).

29 WA 2; 501,38 f. (= LW 27; 238).

»he who presumes that he is righteous in any other way than by believing in Christ rejects Christ and considers Christ's Passion and resurrection useless. However, the person who believes in Christ, who died, dies to sin himself at the same time together with Christ, and whoever believes in the resurrected and living Christ also rises and lives in Christ by the same faith, and Christ lives in him. Therefore, the resurrection of Christ is our righteousness and our life, not only by way of example but also by virtue of its power.«³⁰

The reformer was beginning to break out of the medieval mold expressed in Augustine's »sacrament« and »example« terminology to assert the power of the faith that trusts in God's Word to grasp reality.³¹ Less explicit was his subsequent comment in his meditation on Christ's passion at the end of the decade (1519): »in his suffering Christ makes our sin known and thus destroys it, but through his resurrection he justifies us and delivers us from all sin, if we believe this.«³²

Such associations of justification and resurrection occur on occasion through his career. While at the Coburg in 1530, Luther wrote *On Translating*. It described what faith grasps as the justifying action of God: »it is Christ's death and resurrection alone that saves us and makes us free from sin, as Paul says in Romans 4,« citing the words of verse 25. Without dividing Jesus' death »for sin« and resurrection »for justification,« Luther argued, »alone indeed, all alone, without any works, lays hold of this death and resurrection when it is preached by the gospel. [...] His death and resurrection are our life and our righteousness.«³³ At the outset of his exposition of Galatians in 1531 Luther mentions Romans 4, 25, as he again commented on the first verse of the book, »through God the Father, who raised him from the dead.« Citing the second half of the Romans verse, Luther asserted that Christ's victory »is a victory over the law, sin, our flesh, the world, the devil, death, hell, and all evils« – a rather complete catalog of the enemies of the believer – »and this victory he has given to us,« the justifying gift of righteousness in God's sight. »Even though these tyrants, our enemies, accuse and terrify us, they cannot drive us into despair or

30 WA 2; 455,16-23 (= LW 27; 168).

31 Cf. N. NAGEL, *Sacramentum et Exemplum* in Luther's Understanding of Christ (in: Luther for an Ecumenical Age, ed. C.S. MEYER, 1967, 172-199).

32 WA 2; 140,22-26 (= LW 42; 12 f.).

33 WA 30,2; 642,9-19 (= LW 35; 196 f.).

condemn us. For Christ, whom God the Father raised from the dead, is victor over them, and he is our righteousness.»³⁴

In 1526 the reformer formulated in his *Deutsche Messe* the pedagogical device of placing Bible verses into the pockets of the child. Faith's pocket received the »Rhenish gulden« of Romans 5, 12, »sin came into the world through one man and death through sin,« and Psalm 51, 5, »I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me« as the summary of the crushing law. The gospel's more valuable »Hungarian gulden« were two: Luther joined Romans 4, 25 with John 1, 29, »behold, the Lamb of God, which bears the sins of the world,« as a summary of the object of saving faith.³⁵ He would use the same two passages together while lecturing on Genesis 3, 15 in 1535, there to affirm his doctrine of »redemption and deliverance« through Christ alone.³⁶ He joined the two passages in a similar digest of the gospel in the Smalcald Articles a year later.³⁷ Romans 4, 25 again served as a summation of the content of saving faith in Luther's depiction of the trust of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah at Genesis 23, 2,³⁸ and at Genesis 28, 3-5.³⁹

On the evening before Palm Sunday 1539 Luther preached on the raising of Lazarus (John 11, 1-44) and told the Wittenberg congregation that Christ's »office was to conquer death and to raise the dead from death. We believe that he died for our sins and rose so that we who were dead might live for God and look forward to the resurrection of the flesh.« His comments on the resurrection focused not on the dogmatic terminology of justification by faith but rather the restoration to life which Lazarus enjoyed and which anticipated the resurrection of all believers.⁴⁰ These

34 WA 40,1; 65,10-18 (= LW 26; 21f.).

35 WA 19; 77,23-78,4 (= LW 53; 67).

36 WA 42; 143,38-144,2 (= LW 1; 192); cf. a similar usage in one of his last sermons, January 26, 1546, WA 51; 144,41-145,11 (= LW 58; 381).

37 BSLK, 415; *The Book of Concord*, ed. R. KOLB and T. J. WENGERT, 2000, 301. Luther could, of course, discuss justification with little or no recourse to the atoning work of Christ, as he did in his Theses on Justification in 1536, WA 39,1; 82-86. The focus remained exclusively on the justifying pronouncement of God and on faith rather than works as the human agency of reception of that justification.

38 WA 43; 273,11-14 (= LW 4; 191).

39 WA 43; 563,35-37 (= LW 5; 196).

40 WA 47; 712,8-715,31. Without using the language of Romans 4, 25, Luther attributed to Christ's »passion and resurrection« the power to produce fruit in that the church is

instances illustrate the reformer's continuing resort to the express words, or at least to the concept, found in Romans 4, 25 as a summary of Christ's work, of the gospel.

II Justification in Luther's Easter Preaching

Gustaf Aulén's accent upon the place of Christ's resurrection in Luther's understanding of salvation, even if oversimplified, served as a helpful recalling of the role Jesus' rising from the dead played in the reformer's preaching. In the course of a series of weekly sermons on John's gospel, in 1528-1529, Luther treated the fourth gospel's recital of the resurrection. In commenting on chapter 20 the reformer referred to 20, 31, »these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name,« asserting that John wrote his gospel »for our sakes, that we might believe and through faith might attain the power and fruit of the joyous resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.« The »article of the resurrection« is, Luther claimed, »the highest and foremost« article of the Christian faith.⁴¹ In that particular homiletical presentation Romans 4, 25 and its association of justification with the resurrection did not gain mention, but references to the Romans passage, scattered throughout a variety of Luther's writings,⁴² do also occur in significant passages in his Easter preaching.

Sermons from every Easter during his career are not extant. His proclamation of the Easter message on March 29, 1521, is. It begins with a brief treatment of the Lord's Supper, reminding his hearers that Christ poured out his blood for the forgiveness of their sins so that they might place their sins upon him. »Then he rose and conquered sin. [...] The proper use of Christ's suffering is to produce faith that he took my sins upon

victorious over death, sin and the devil, combining his suffering and his resurrection, which, in the language of Isa 53, 12, »justifies many.« For his students in his lecture on Isaiah 53 (1544), WA 40,3; 737,1-38; Luther described the Servant's »justifying many« (Isa 53, 12) as the fruit of his suffering and resurrection.

⁴¹ WA 28; 429,14-24.

⁴² E. g. his preface to Romans (1522), WAB 7; 6,17-19 (= LW 35; 368); Adoration of Sacrament (1523), WA 11; 450,31-451,3 (= LW 36; 298); Theses concerning Faith and Law (1535), WA 39,1; 45,21f. (= LW 34; 110).

himself. Then one has faith that he rose for me. When you have thrown your sins on him, you have to pay attention to where they are. His sin, his death, are gone, and everything he received from you. Now you see nothing other than life, joy, and salvation. [...] Your sin is in his body, your life in his resurrection.⁴³ This use of the motif of the »joyous exchange« between Christ and the sinner, had been prominent in Luther's *Freedom of a Christian* published in the previous year. That treatise contains no explicit reference to Romans 4, 25. However, Luther does assert that only one thing is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom, three terms he used roughly synonymously. The »most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ,« is that one thing needful, and this Word he summarized with John 11, 25, «I am the resurrection and the life,« as well as John 8, 36, on Christ's liberation of his people, and Matthew 4, 4, that God's Word is all-sufficient.⁴⁴ He further defines the Word as the »gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it,« provided it trusts in the one whom God raised from the dead (Romans 10, 9).⁴⁵ The Easter sermon of 1521 conveys Luther's concept of justification even if he does not employ the terminology of »justification« there. The preacher tied the restoration of righteousness in God's sight closely to the defeat of the enemies from which God has liberated sinners, as *Freedom of a Christian* had emphasized: in the sermon of 1521 Luther used his beloved image of Christ as the one who devours death and drowns it in his own life; he places his human nature on the hook of his divine nature as bait and swallows up death.⁴⁶

43 WA 9; 658,36-659,10.

44 In *Freedom of a Christian*, WA 7; 50,33-38 (cf. the German, WA 7; 22,3-8) (= LW 31; 345). Cf. WA 7; 25,26-26,12 (German), WA 7; 54,29-55,23 (Latin), esp. 55,16-20, where Luther depicts Christ's sharing of his righteousness with the sinner, giving the sinner »eternal righteousness, life, and salvation.« When preaching at the Coburg on Easter Sunday 1530 Luther again used the image of the hook and bait which trapped Satan. This time the earthworm was Christ's righteousness, »which cannot perish or be condemned« and therefore provided the victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell, WA 32; 41,18-42. 43,11-19. Trust in Christ's resurrection victory brings his righteousness to the believer, WA 32; 43,20-36.

45 WA 7; 51,15-20 (= LW 31; 346).

46 WA 9; 661,10-35.

That afternoon the preacher continued his treatment of Mark 16, building on the morning sermon to accentuate the »Sabbath of the heart,« the freedom, especially freedom of conscience, which Christ's resurrection produces.⁴⁷

On Easter Sunday 1525 Luther preached on »the use and fruit of Christ's resurrection.« Mark's gospel was the text; Romans 4, 25 set the outline and topic of the sermon in place.⁴⁸ After dwelling at length on the afflictions of the sinner as a »bag of worms,«⁴⁹ the sermon turned to »our righteousness,« obtained through Christ's resurrection. Because Christ is God, he cannot die; because he is human, sin could be laid upon him, and he could stand accused as any other human being. Therefore, temporal death attacked him, »wants to devour him, swallow him down. But he is not a person bound to time but an eternal person, who cannot die, and therefore he withstands this episode, for in Christ the power of life is hidden, which devours death and overpowers it.«⁵⁰ Therefore, Christ's death and resurrection »have to be the beginning, middle, and end of our righteousness,« for he makes sinners alive as people who are innocent and without guilt.⁵¹ »Even if you work yourself to death, it will not help you, for Paul's judgment is that he died for our sin etc. [= and was raised for our justification]. If you do not believe Paul's words, you are still in sin. Seek righteousness wherever you wish, but it is lost.«⁵²

Luther had preached on the gospel lesson for Easter two years earlier, in 1523,⁵³ a sermon that appeared in the *Sommerpostille* of 1526. He set its topic, also in this sermon entitled »on the fruit and power of Christ's resurrection,« in place with the use of Romans 4, 25. Citing the verse, he commented »On this [»Christ's being handed over for our sins and being raised for our righteousness«] enough has been said in this sermon. Whoever wishes to think more about this subject will find more on it in this

47 WA 9; 663,3-665,27.

48 WA 17,1; 184,30-185,16.

49 WA 17,1; 185,17-187,34.

50 WA 17,1; 189,17-31.

51 WA 17,1; 191,37f.; cf. the Latin, »Ergo principium, medium et finis et perfectio nostrae iustitiae est, quod Christus pro nobis mortuus et resurrexit« (191,11-13).

52 WA 17,1; 192,26-29.

53 According to Georg Buchwald's estimate, WA 10,1,2; LXXXII.

postil, so whoever is looking for this topic, should look for it and read.⁵⁴ This sermon introduced a theme to which Luther returned a number of times in subsequent Easter sermons. He borrowed a line from Matthew's account of Christ's resurrection (28, 10, cf. John 20, 17), Jesus' telling Mary and Mary Magdalene, »Go and tell my brothers.« From that Luther spoke of what it means to be the siblings of Christ and thus »fellow heirs« with him of all that he is and has under his power. With recourse to 1 Corinthians 1, 30 – God has made Christ Jesus »our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption« – the preacher employed a variation of his »joyous exchange« analogy, telling his hearers that they, having become God's children, share everything with him who is eternal truth, power, wisdom, and righteousness, who rules everything in heaven and on earth, who has all in his hands.⁵⁵ A decade later, making use of the theme of »brothers« and »heirs« once more, Luther underscored the transformation of relationships that these words indicate takes place in the life and thinking of sinners. »My Lord Christ, who died for me and rose from the dead, says to me that all my sins are forgotten, and he wants to be my brother and he wants me to be his brother, me, a scoundrel and a villain, indeed the very brother of despicable devil. As such I do not want to accept this [gift from God]. Although I am not worthy of it, I really need it, and even if that were not the case, God is worthy of my giving him the honor and regarding him as true God. If I do not believe, I commit, above and be-

54 WA 10,1,2; 214,7. 220,4f., and 217,26-38.

55 WA 10,1,2; 215,7-18. In his second sermon on Easter 1530, at the Coburg, Luther treated this topic extensively, WA 32; 79,3-93,26. In it he spoke at length in the language of the »joyous exchange,« reminding his hearers that Christ shares his »righteousness, life, wisdom, joy and comfort« with them, WA 32; 82,12-16. He praised the »presumptuousness« [Vermessenheit] of faith that grasps Christ as its own, WA 32; 87,3-36. The »joyous exchange« of having Christ as brother and joint-heir occurs also in Luther's Eastern sermon of April 5, 1533, WA 37; 358,5-363,6. Themes from 1520, in *Freedom of a Christian*, including liberation from and power over sin, death, and the devil, as well as the »joyous exchange« are repeated in this sermon. The concept of Christ's being brother and co-heir with believers occurs also in the Eastern sermon of March 28, 1535, WA 41; 51,20-55,8. In 1538 the theme of »brother« and »heir« again shaped much of what Luther told Elector Johann Friedrich and other hearers on Easter Monday, as he treated John 20, 17, WA 46; 329,12-354,24. Luther's second Easter sermon in the House Postil also treats this concept extensively, WA 52; 255,26-256,33.

yond all other sins, the greatest dishonor against the first commandment, in that I regarding him as a liar and a useless god.«⁵⁶ Without recourse to the language of justification, Luther clearly linked the restoration of the relationship between God and the sinner, which he believed constituted the righteousness of the human creature, to Christ's rising from the grave and the promise from his lips as he came back from death.

The affirmation that believers are Christ's siblings led Luther in 1538 to use Romans 4, 25 to come closer to explaining in what way Christ's death and resurrection each function. That he died and rose again »so that we might become his brothers« raised the question: why would Christ have needed to die and rise if not »that he might step in and take my sins and God's wrath upon himself through his cross and death, and through his resurrection give me a place as the heir of the forgiveness of all sins, eternal salvation and glory.«⁵⁷ Righteousness, Luther asserted, causes and constitutes this relationship of having Christ as brother, created not by the very best human performance in keeping God's commands but by Christ's making us God's children and bestowing forgiveness of sins and life eternal upon them. Then »you hear this word of Christ saying to you, ›Good morning my dear brother, in me your sin and death have been overcome. What I have done, have done for you.«⁵⁸ Luther used synonyms for his understanding of righteousness without expressing the fruits of the resurrection with that term. Restoration to righteousness lay for Luther in Christ's taking away sin and death, thus bestowing life through his own death and resurrection. That restores the relationship of sinners with their Creator and Father.

As he grew older, Luther proclaimed the resurrection with as much zest and zeal as ever. In 1544 he again took Mark 16 as his text on Easter Sunday. Without specific or precise citation of Romans 4, 25 he connected Christ's death and resurrection closely with each other and with the nature of God as Creator: God's original work of creation had »gotten moldy, obsolete, obscured, so that we could hardly recognize it as creation. Now there is a new day, a new beginning. Christ has renewed us, polished us

⁵⁶ WA 46; 343,12-20.

⁵⁷ WA 46; 348,16-30.

⁵⁸ WA 46; 351,27-352,21.

up, made us new – yes, even us! That is a joyous proclamation of God's mercy, which he began and completed in his dear Son.⁵⁹ On Christ's cross he completed everything – eternal life and righteousness. »He drowned and lynched death, sin, and hell and broke them to pieces – all of them disappeared. There they all are hanging on the gallows in the bright sun, condemned, accursed.« Luther summarized the battle that had ended in Christ's victory with a reference to Colossians 2, 15 with its comparison of the resurrection to a Roman parade of triumph, which put the conquered powers on public display in a spectacle of shame.⁶⁰ This victory becomes complete on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit brings God's people to faith, giving them life and righteousness, even though it may not seem visible in the midst of a sinful world.⁶¹ As he moved toward the completion of his sermon, »Christ died for me, that the sin in me should be dead and that righteousness might be alive in me again,« Luther created several brief dialogs to drive home his point. The law addressed fallen human nature, »you have sinned, you belong to the devil,« to which that nature must agree. Luther urged this nature to open its eyes to the gospel and listen: Christ is not to be found among the dead. He has devoured and strangled the law, the devil, and death. The sinner should look all three in eye and say, »don't you know that the man who is named Christ has chomped you down? He has strangled you. He chewed you up again and today has risen from the dead. The battle is over.«⁶² Luther then moved toward his conclusion that believers are alive in the righteousness which Christ has given by first fashioning a prayer, »O, my dear Lord Christ, awake in me the power of your resurrection. Teach me to sing properly ›Christ is arisen,‹« and his hearers were to pray in this manner: »when sin, hell, and the devil want to provoke you and terrify you, protect yourself [by saying]: ›are you listening, devil and sin, Christ is arisen.‹ You had to stomp on his head, devil. Get out of here. You killed an innocent man. If you try it again, you will also be able to believe and sing. Then you can stay. But you are lost [...].«⁶³

59 WA 49; 353,25-31.

60 WA 49; 353,33-354,31.

61 WA 49; 355,32-357,25.

62 WA 49; 357,30-37.

63 WA 49; 359,31-37.

Luther's first sermon for Easter in the House Postil (1544), which Rörer reported Luther had preached in Wittenberg's town church in 1531, focused on Jesus' walk to Emmaus with the two disciples (Luke 24, 13-35). The scene embraced »two different pictures.« »The one is the sad, miserable, shameful, horrible, bloody picture which we have heard about on Good Friday, Christ hanging among the murderers and dying in great pain.« That presented Christ »as the true, eternal priest [who] gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins and with his death intended to pay for them.« Three days later Christ presents »another, beautiful, lively, cheery, joyous picture in himself, from which we certainly learn to take comfort, that not only are all our sins eliminated and destroyed through Christ's death but also that through his resurrection we are to become righteous.« This he affirmed on the basis of Romans 4, 25 and 1 Corinthians 15, 17f.⁶⁴ The rest of the sermon may be seen as an exposition of these verses, particularly the former.

The second picture eliminated the sin that the first placed upon Christ; it depicts »nothing other than righteousness, no pain and sorrow, but only joy, no death, but only life, and eternal life, which is far, far greater than temporal life.«⁶⁵ In developing the two pictures Luther had no hesitation to use the language of »payment« in describing what Christ accomplished on the cross. But he moved freely from that language to the language of victory on the battlefield over death and to the affirmation that Christ had risen from the dead to justify his people.⁶⁶ In this sermon, too, he turned to Colossians 2, this time using verse 14 as well as 15. Christ cancelled the statement of debt which the law had issued. As a kind of register of the sinner's debt, the conscience had testified against sinners. Just like a merchant confronted with a pledge to pay, signed and sealed by his own hand, sinners stand accused and condemned. But Christ nailed that statement to the cross. He made a hole right through it, tore it to shreds, so it has no validity anymore and can do no harm. Why can it not? »The Lord Christ was hanging for this reason on the cross, that he might step into our sin and pay for our sin with his body. That is the first picture.«⁶⁷ The second picture of Colossians

⁶⁴ WA 52; 246,36-247,22.

⁶⁵ WA 52; 247,23-33.

⁶⁶ E. g., WA 52; 248,15-249,6; cf. 255,14f. 259,3-5.

⁶⁷ WA 52; 249,7-36.

2 displayed again, as in the Easter sermon delivered in 1544, the spectacle of the Christian's enemies suffering the triumph of the resurrected Lord. He conquered death by enduring its attack as a righteous person. The result was that the three powerful enemies, death, sin, and the devil, lie at his feet. »We should take this to heart and believe firmly that in Christ God has fought with the devil and won; in Christ righteousness fought with sin and won; in Christ life fought with death, goodness with evil, honor with slander, and it won.«⁶⁸ Good Friday depicted »how our sin, our curse, and our death lay on Christ, but we see on Easter another picture, with no sin, no curse, no wrath, no death, but simply life, grace, salvation, and righteousness in Christ.« That picture sets hearts upright and comforts them.⁶⁹ By joining the words »righteous« or »righteousness« to a number of synonyms, Luther called his hearers' attention to the change in reality which Christ's resurrection had effected in their lives.

The second Easter sermon in the House Postil again wove 1 Corinthians 1,30, »Christ was made by God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption« together with the effect of Christ's resurrection. The inheritance that the risen Christ shares with his people includes his being their righteousness. For those who not only live in sin but were conceived and born in sin, Christ has come »so that God does not look upon our sin nor count it against us, but he gives us the gift and steps back. For to be righteous means that God regards us as righteous despite the fact that we are on our own, poor miserable sinners.«⁷⁰

Although Luther avoided precise description of the mechanics of justification through Christ's resurrection, he did regard the resurrection as the triumph and final setting aside of sin and guilt, of the power of Satan and death. That is what his people needed to hear, he believed. From early in his career to its end he spoke of Christ's death and resurrection as inseparable. Together they constituted God's way of dealing with the reality of human sinfulness and his own wrath against sin as well as his desire to restore his straying human creatures to righteousness, that is, to life in communion with himself.

68 WA 52; 250,23-35.

69 WA 52; 250,36-251,6.

70 WA 52; 257,12-17.

III Justifying Faith in the Risen Christ

Knowing this benefits not at all unless believers recognize that »everything which God has done in Christ, happened for me, has been given to me, bestowed upon me, with the result that his resurrection has its impact on me, so that I arise and become alive with him,«⁷¹ as he remarked in the Summer Postil of 1526. Christ's »rising for our righteousness« means, Luther argued, that as Abraham grasped God's promise to him, believers must trust that Christ's resurrection has taken away and trampled down the serpent's enmity, the curse, sin, death; and the devil. This liberating word from God takes over human hearts as it conquers death, the devil, sin, and every adversity as it turns look at Christ, »who has taken my sins on himself, tramped on the serpent's head, and become the blessing that lifts sin from my conscience and placed it on Christ, whom my sins wanted to kill. [...] God came and tore Christ away from those sins, made him alive, and not just alive, but placed him in the heavens and has him ruling over everything.« Echoing Romans 5, 12–21 (Christ as the Second Adam), the sermon continues to speak in terms of the joyous exchange, but also picturing Christ, laden with human sin, using his strength to stomp all sins into the ground and establishing his rule over all things for eternity, »so that I have a good conscience, am filled with joy, blessed, without fear of this tyrant since Christ took my sin from me and placed it upon himself.«⁷² Here the resurrection dealt directly with death and the sin that had caused it. The resurrection placed both outside the reality of the lives of those for whom Christ's death served as the fulfillment of the law's demand for the death of the sinner.

The apprehension and enjoyment in the conscience depends on trust in the proclamation of the resurrection. This trust »creates« the »god« whom people follow, as Luther said in his Large Catechism.⁷³ When directed to Christ, the true God, trust creates a new identity for those who have this confident faith. At this point in the sermon the focus of Luther's description of the righteousness of the believer falls upon liberation from

⁷¹ WA 10,1,2; 220,9–16.

⁷² WA 10,1,2; 220,19–221,30.

⁷³ Explanation to the First commandment, BSLK, 560f., *Book of Concord* (s. n. 37), 386f.

sin, but that liberation here is attained not through penal suffering or satisfying the law's demands (as earlier in this sermon),⁷⁴ but simply on Christ's eliminating sin through his resurrection victory. Hosea 13,14, speaking of redemption from death, and 1 Corinthians 15,54–57, provide more support for the conclusion of Romans 4, 25b. Luther paraphrased the latter passage,

»Death, what happened to your teeth? Come on, bite my finger off. For a while you had a spear; where did it go? Christ took it away from you, death. Where is your spear now? Sin, where is your stiletto and your power? The power of sin, according to Saint Paul, is the law. The more accurately the law is understood, the more sin puts on the pressure and smothers. That is why Paul said that Christ has pulverized the spear and whetstone and destroyed them.«

That meant that Christ »took away death and our sin and made us righteous with his resurrection.« That becomes effective in the believer's life through trust, confidence even in the midst of the on-going struggle with sin.⁷⁵

Luther's sermon at the Coburg in 1530 made it clear that trusting in Christ's resurrection as having happened »for me« is itself the victory that brings salvation. Christ bestows righteousness in the midst of his people's sin and life in the midst of their death. »For sin, a bad conscience, hunger, disease, war, and such things, whatever it may be – you face them all on the basis of your having practiced well and your being well equipped [to combat them]. Therefore, you will quickly see that this terrible picture is nothing but the devil's weapon, and he will never rest.« Satan is always venturing to tempt believers. Even though they cannot take on sin, Jesus can, and so they look to him. In him they find victory and triumph. »On Good Friday I saw all my sins still hanging on Christ, but on Easter they are all gone.« Filled with hope, believers are not struck with fear in the face of sin and death. They hold fast to the resurrection and trust that »we have righteousness in the midst of sin and life in the midst of death through Christ.«⁷⁶ Again, the interaction of Christ's death and his resurrection in the restoration dare not be played off against each other. For Luther the two belong inseparably together.

⁷⁴ Cf. ALTHAUS, *Theologie* (s. n. 3), 178-183, *Theology* (s. n. 3), 202-208.

⁷⁵ WA 10,1,2; 221,35-223,8.

⁷⁶ WA 32; 44,32-45,30.

That afternoon Luther proceeded with his treatment of the text; it led him to speak of another kind of righteousness, active righteousness, exercised in following God's command and fulfilling his callings for service in his world. Faith in Christ's resurrection creates this righteousness in the believer. Governmental officials, parents, children, servants all please God when they live in the righteousness which he commands and to which he calls. Nonetheless, Luther insisted that this righteousness which belongs on earth is not the righteousness with which God's people want to die. »When we die, we must have another righteousness, the righteousness of Christ,«⁷⁷ the righteousness bestowed through his resurrection.

As throughout his Easter preaching Luther's message in his last years emphasized the believer's appropriation of Christ's work through faith. In the House Postil faith was to take hold of the picture of life and find joy and comfort in it.⁷⁸ One aspect of faith, banishing of fear of death, devil, and world, which causes the heart to jump for joy and sing God an eternal »*Te Deum laudamus*.«⁷⁹ Trust that Christ has made his people his own siblings and co-heirs moves them to have the confidence to pray.⁸⁰ It also moves them to »put their sinful desires and activities to death and lay them aside and to live as God's chosen people, holy, beloved, and to put on heartfelt mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, so that everyone may bear the other and forgive, etc.,« as Paul had written in Colossians 3, 12 f.⁸¹ The Lucan commission of Christ to preach repentance and forgiveness of sin among all peoples also arose out of Christ's suffering and his rising from the dead and faith in his work. That living in the rhythm of law and gospel arose from the death and resurrection of Christ and bestowed grace and righteousness upon the sinner in God's sight and in the exercise of love for the neighbor.⁸²

77 WA 32; 52,23-39.

78 WA 52; 251,32-253,4.

79 WA 46; 333,20-26; cf. WA 52; 254,6-17.

80 WA 46; 344,13-28.

81 WA 52; 258,23-34.

82 WA 52; 261,31-265,10.

IV *Risen with Christ in Baptism*

Paul's argument in Romans 4 continues through chapter five's association of death with Adam and restoration of life with Christ (5, 12-21) into his address of daily Christian living set in place through the new identity bestowed in baptism in chapter six. Luther did not cite 4, 25 explicitly in lecturing on the sixth chapter in 1515-1516. However, with reference to Augustine's comments on the chapter,⁸³ he did focus on the death to sin and gift of new life in baptism, which bring sinners out from death's dominion into the rule of righteousness.⁸⁴ His later understanding of the justifying nature of the baptismal form of God's Word as promise is not yet evident at this point, but within the schema of »*sacramentum*« and »*exemplum*,« Luther emphasized the crucifixion of the old self (Romans 6, 6) and the resurrection of the »inner person« as Paul described it in Colossians 3, 1.⁸⁵ »Baptism was established to direct us toward death and through this death to life,« Luther concluded, although he focused not on the decisive act of God's justifying Word but rather on the struggle with the continuing presence of sin and evil in the lives of the baptized, from which they must die in daily repentance.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Jens Wolff concludes that here Luther views the »death of death« as a parallel in its designation of life to »the sin of sin,« interpreting it as clearly an affirmation of the bestowal of righteousness.⁸⁷ The reformer was still on his way toward the mature understanding of God's restoration of the sinner to righteousness in his sight that justifies Jonathan Trigg's judgment that Luther's »doctrine of justification by faith is intimately related to – indeed even predicated upon – [his] understanding of the abiding covenant of baptism.«⁸⁸

In the several series of baptismal sermons which the Wittenberg congregation heard from Luther's lips over the years, the connection of the bestowal of righteousness through the baptismal participation in Christ's

83 *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos*, § 35 (PL 35:2069).

84 WA 56; 321,10-25 (= LW 25; 308).

85 WA 56; 321,25-322,5 (= LW 25; 309 f.).

86 WA 56; 324,27-33 (= LW 25; 312).

87 WOLFF, *Metapher und Kreuz* (s. n. 9), 482 f., referring to WA 56; 323,12-27; cf. Wolff's further development of this comparison, pp. 486-488.

88 TRIGG, *Baptism* (s. n. 6), 2.

resurrection deepened and expanded this point in the Romans lecture. In 1525 he introduced a lengthy examination of Romans 6 into a sermon on Matthew 5, 20, detailing the death to sin which baptism accomplishes and also proclaiming that »just as Christ died and suffered death, he also rose. Indeed, Christ did both, entering into death and leaving it behind, and we, too, enter into death through faith. Through him we die and are buried. Through his resurrection we move into life and his resurrection.«⁸⁹

In 1528, preparing for writing his catechisms, Luther told the congregation that in Romans 6 Paul had taught that »baptism kills us with Christ, so that we may die to sin, so that sin is drowned, and killed with Christ ... with Christ we go down and die to sin.«⁹⁰ Then, »through the washing« of Titus 3, 5, sinners »become new creatures: an essential transformation takes place in the person, so that I come from sin to righteousness, from death, etc. and this is no sign.« Luther points to »many passages« in the New Testament, »where remissions of sins, death to sin, putting on Christ, a washing of new birth are ascribed to baptism.«⁹¹ In this and other passages which bring together the death of the sinner to the judgment and condemnation of sin and the resurrection of that sinner to new life as God's child, the reformer did not cite Romans 4, 25, nor did he dwell on the connection of Christ's death and resurrection to the baptismal act of new creation. He did, however explicitly link this death of the sinful self and restoration of life to justification by faith. The link between the two must have been obvious to preacher and hearers who knew the reformer's Small Catechism's use of Romans 6 in speaking of baptism and its impact on daily life.⁹²

89 WA 17,1; 339,3-7. In a sermon of October 6, 1532, he also brought Christ's death for human sin into connection with the gift of life given through Christ's resurrection, without using the specific language of Romans 4, 25, including the word »justification,« WA 36; 542,13-543,13. He pursued the same topic in the sermon of the following Sunday, WA 36; 551,4-554,22. See G. EBELING, *Des Todes Tod. Luthers Theologie der Konfrontation mit dem Tode* (ZThK 84, 1987, 162-194, esp. 172-179).

90 WA 27; 59,25-29.

91 WA 27; 60,3-7. Cf. a similar passage in his sermon of January 25, 1534, where Luther said that the the washing of regeneration of Titus 3 makes the baptized »jung und new. Ibi exutus vetus homo, mortem, Ex morte in vitam, ex peccato in iusticiam, ex ira gratiam, nascimur ex hac vita in eternam,« WA 37; 266,5f.

92 E.g., a sermon of February 1, 1534, WA 37; 20-34, which explicitly links the death of the sinful self and the restoration of life to justification by faith. In a sermon of February

Luther's use of Romans 4, 25 reveals that his understanding of the restoration of human righteousness – passive or »alien« in God's sight, but also active or »proper« in relationship to God's creatures – flows from his understanding of what Christ accomplished by dying and rising from the dead in behalf of sinners. He continued to speak of Christ's death as the substitutionary satisfaction for the penalty imposed by the law of God and the wrath against sin that stood behind it. This ending of sin and death was an integral part of the restoration of righteousness in God's sight, Luther was convinced. Also integral to his understanding of justification was the restoration of life which Christ's resurrection accomplished and which he exchanged with his bride as he buried human sin through his death and bestowed life through his resurrection, above all, in baptism. The restoration of human righteousness in God's sight not only involved losing one's sinfulness, Luther believed. It also involved the restoration of life, a life of righteousness in God's view and also in the visible, tangible fulfillment of God's expectations for the practice of the righteousness of love toward the neighbor and the rest of creation. Romans 4, 25 served well as a summary of the Wittenberg reformer's conception of the work of Christ as the basis of the justification of sinners.

17, 1538, he more explicitly refers to the blood and death of Christ as bestowing »morfificatio peccati et mortis« and the washing of regeneration »donacio iusticiae et vitae.« WA 46; 176,2-12. Two weeks later, March 3, 1538, he also spoke of baptism in connection with Christ's blood and asserted that it »wircke das lebenn unnd ewige seligkeit reinige vom tode, von den sunden unnd aller ungerechtigkeit und mach uns kinder der ewigen seligkeit« through the eternal covenant with Christ which baptism effects, WA 46; 195,22-26. In his sermons for the baptism of Bernhard of Anhalt, April 1 and 2, 1540, he focused on the joyous exchange effected by Christ's death, WA 49; 120,25-121,27, and WA 49; 124,23-32, but in the latter passage he described the exchange with reference to the baptized's receiving »righteousness and life.« His subsequent elaboration of this reiterates that Christ died for sin without repeating the other half of Romans 4, 25, concerning his resurrection, WA 49; 125,6-127,36; 131,41-133,16.